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Sarah Blattner

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Blattner

Alphonso Mucha & the Emergence of the “New Women” during the Bell Epoque

Presenter: Sarah Blattner

Faculty Mentor: Aaron Haberman

Abstract: Notions of ideal femininity in Western culture shifted during the belle époque or “beautiful era,” the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This essay serves as a comparative historical study examining the shifting representations of women in art within Western society during the modern era. More specifically, this essay focuses on the transition from the “modest maiden” popular in the mid-nineteenth century to the “new woman” emerging within the Art Nouveau movement. Through the works of Alphonse Mucha, the typical representation of women portrayed in Art Nouveau is explored. Mucha’s representations serve as social commentary indicative of the shift towards modernity. Through the employment of symbolism, archetypes, and thematic motifs, the women depicted in Mucha’s works are socially empowered through their participation in masculine activities their presence in the public sphere. Mucha’s utilization of sensual imagery and floral motifs further indicate a sexually liberated woman emerging at the turn of the century.